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Sent: 3/20/2008 2:01:37 PM
Subject: More indecision in Honolulu

All: the articles below are examples of the situation in Honolulu "where the more things change, the more they stay the same."

Council to rethink transit options

By Sean Hao

Advertiser

3/20/08

Technologies including Advanced Public Transportation Systems' rubber-tire-on-concrete proposal are back in the running for Honolulu's fixed-guideway transit system. The City Council last night voted unanimously to consider rubber-tire-on-concrete, as well as magnetic levitation and steel-on-steel technology, which had been endorsed last month by the council.

The City Council decided last night to reconsider whether Honolulu's planned \$3.7 billion mass transit system will use rubber wheels, steel wheels or no wheels.

The move comes about a month after a council committee had endorsed steel wheels on steel rail as the preferred technology.

The City Council voted unanimously to consider magnetic levitation, rubber on concrete and steel technology for the project.

The change follows concern that steel technology could cause noise problems for neighbors of the elevated commuter rail and possibly hurt property values.

By keeping the other technology options alive, "We will be able to look further (into) the implication of this technology," said Councilman Romy Cachola. "What it does is (allow us to see if) there is a better technology that works to address noise better, or (that's) not going to negatively impact property values."

Mayor Mufi Hannemann said while he was pleased the council voted 9-0 to advance the project, he was disappointed that it has not settled on a single technology.

"Tonight's vote means that rail is still moving forward," he said in a news release. "But it is a shame that the council could not support the process it voted to create."

Hannemann said he is confident steel technology will ultimately be chosen, and pointed out that 56 of 62 federally funded major transit projects since 1992 use steel wheels on steel tracks.

Steel wheel and rail was recommended by a council-appointed panel for its reliability, capability, cost and rider comfort. However, four of five panelists who made the recommendation in February also rated steel technology as the noisiest alternative compared with rubber on concrete, magnetic levitation and monorail technologies.

'NOT ALL NOISE ... EQUAL'

The council's vote followed nearly seven hours of testimony on issues such as the project's impact on noise, property values and traffic.

The proposed elevated rail would link East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center.

AR00145585

Some of the discussion focused on whether steel-on-steel technology could pose problems for some residents near the elevated tracks, where trains will pass at up to 55 mph about 400 times a day from 4 a.m. to midnight.

Mark Smith, vice president for Citizens Against Noise of Hawaii, urged the council to more thoroughly study the noise impacts of alternative technologies such as rubber tires on concrete, magnetic levitation and monorail before making a decision.

"Not all noise is created equal," he said. "The noise of steel wheels on steel rails makes a high-pitch noise that is particularly disconcerting.

"I don't think that anyone of us knows what will become of tourism in this island in our state if we install a rail system that is noisy. Are we willing to take that chance?"

Numerous testifiers felt the city should stick with steel technology.

"By selecting that independent panel I implore you to abide by their recommendation," said Honolulu real estate attorney Kenneth Wong. "I believe the steel rail technology is really a proven technology. It's really good for Honolulu."

Kurt Fevella of 'Ewa Beach agreed.

"We should stick with the professional panel because the majority of you guys chose the professional panel," he said. "We should move on already."

2009 TARGET

The City Council is expected to vote on the matter two more times. The next vote likely will come in early April, though no date has been set.

The city wants to decide on the type of vehicle before drafting an environmental impact statement and applying for federal transit money. Hannemann hopes to break ground on the project in 2009, with the first segment starting service between East Kapolei and Waipahu in 2012.

Steel-on-steel technology proponents contend that modern rail technology won't pose noise issues that cannot be mitigated.

Still, the city's consultant, New York-based Parsons Brinckerhoff, has identified steel technology as the noisiest alternative when compared with monorail and magnetic levitation technology in a May 2007 report. The consultant did not evaluate the potential noise impact of rubber-tired bus technology.

Steel-wheel-based train noise could be limited by building a 3- to 5-foot wall along the sides of the nearly 30-foot-high track, according to Parsons Brinckerhoff.

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Council expands transit options

The mayor criticizes a vote to allow more discussion on types of transit technology

By Laurie Au

Star Bulletin

3/20/08

Even though an expert panel selected rail as the technology for the city's \$3.7 billion mass-transit system, the City Council will consider whether a vehicle with rubber tires or magnetic levitation will work in Honolulu.

The City Council voted 5-4 to amend a bill to consider the rubber-tire-on-concrete option along with rail. After six hours of discussion focused on including an elevated bus system, Councilman Todd Apo also proposed including magnetic levitation, a last-minute change that passed unanimously.

"Tonight's vote means that rail is still moving forward," Mayor Mufi Hannemann said in a statement last night. "But it is a shame that the Council could not support the process it voted to create. The Council did not fully support the findings of the technical panel that a majority of the Council members voted for."

While some councilmembers said the revised bill will allow more discussion on the different technologies, others expressed frustration on revisiting options that an expert panel had dismissed.

Councilman Charles Djou, who clapped his hands over his face when a second floor draft amendment was introduced at 8 p.m., called the whole process a "farce."

Added Councilman Gary Okino, who voted against including the rubber-tire option, "Continuing to keep more than one technology will just bog down the project, which in the end will only cost us more."

"The public really hasn't had the chance to look at the alternatives," said Councilwoman Ann Kobayashi, who has been pushing a rubber-tire system. "People think mass transit has to be a train, and it doesn't have to be that way."

More than 60 people testified at a lengthy City Council meeting yesterday, with the views split on the technology for the elevated 20-mile system running from Kapolei to Ala Moana Center.

U.S. Rep. Neil Abercrombie said he will leave the decision of the technology up to the City Council, but strongly urged them to make a choice quickly so a delay does not jeopardize federal funding for the project.

Critics of the rail system argued it would be too noisy and costly, with little impact in alleviating the traffic congestion. Others argued that the Council should stick with the decision by a panel of experts.

"I feel they should put their pride and their political endeavors aside and let the decision made by the expert panel move forward," said Kurt Fevella, an Ewa Beach resident.

The city administration argued that having multiple technology options would increase the cost for the preliminary engineering studies.

The bill goes back to the Council's transportation committee before a final vote by the Council as early as next month.

The city spent \$55,000 so far on a panel of transit experts that selected rail in February as the technology for the system. The panel said rail is the most reliable and most common in cities and would give the city a competitive advantage when seeking a company to handle construction.

At a meeting Tuesday with Star-Bulletin editors and reporters, Hannemann said he believes several councilmembers are hesitant in supporting the panel's decision because they are being lobbied.

"I really believe why some of them are hung up on technology is that there's money to be made and they're being lobbied," Hannemann said. "(This) is why I say keep the technology out of the hands of politicians and let the experts handle it. It'll insulate us from the wooing game that takes place."